

Labour Market Segmentation within Ethnic Economies: The Ethnic Penalty for Invisible Kurdish Migrants in the United Kingdom

Work, Employment and Society
2022, Vol. 36(2) 328–344
© The Author(s) 2021



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/09500170211034761
journals.sagepub.com/home/wes



Mehmet Rauf Kesici 
The Free University of Berlin, Germany

Abstract

Despite the extensive literature on the labour market outcomes of migration, little attention has been given to labour market inequalities within ethnic economies containing internal ethnicity. This article, using a field-study, multi-segmented labour market approach and the enclave hypothesis, contributes to the literature by demonstrating the key roles of different migration patterns and ethnic disparities in shaping labour market segmentation. It focuses on how and why Kurdish migrants are located in the lower segments of the labour market in their shared ethnic (migrant) economy in London. It argues that the Kurds' underprivileged position associated with an ethnic penalty for them in the UK results from their relatively recent migration history, (un)documented asylum status and the ongoing persecution against them in Turkey. The article concludes that different migration histories, particular motivations for migration and ethnic disparities stratify migrants into distinct segments of the labour market in the country of destination.

Keywords

ethnic economy, ethnic penalty, internal ethnicity, Kurdish labour, migration, segmentation, work

Introduction

There are few studies on the labour market inequalities within ethnic economies, although the labour market outcomes of migration have been widely studied within the literature on labour, migration and ethnic economies. To contribute to the sparse literature on this

Corresponding author:

Mehmet Rauf Kesici, School of Business and Economics, The Free University of Berlin, Room 116,
Garystraße 55, 14195 Berlin, Germany.
Email: rauf.kesici@fu-berlin.de

subject, this article adopts a multi-segmented labour market framework and the enclave hypothesis to examine the labour market patterns of Kurdish migrants¹ from Turkey within an ethnic economy (migrant economy) in the UK. The article also investigates how and why Kurdish migrants operate in the lower segments of the labour market while Turks and Turkish Cypriots are located in the higher segments of the same ethnic economy.

The article uses an internal ethnicity approach to refer to the diverse ethnic (sub) groups within migrant groups (Bozorgmehr, 1997; Light et al., 1993). In ethnic or migrant economies, internal ethnicity represents the ethnic variety and/or inter- and intra-ethnic variations. Specifically, the ethnic economy examined in this study comprises three migrant groups: Kurdish migrants from Turkey, Turkish migrants from Turkey, and Turkish migrants from Cyprus, and their respective descendants. The article, therefore, benefits from a comparative perspective that juxtaposes Kurdish migrants with Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants to explore the labour market outcomes of an ethnic group within an ethnic economy and, thus, to examine the consequences of migration and ethnicity in labour markets.

In this context, the findings of this article indicate that it is essential to consider migration histories, migration motivations and ethnic disparities when examining the different labour market outcomes among migrant groups within ethnic economies. The article also identifies a need to explore how inequalities in the country of origin are transferred to the destination country, and to investigate the systemic forms of discrimination existing in the country of destination, in order to fully grasp the inner functioning of ethnic economies and explain why certain groups occupy the lowest segments within their ethnic economies. Similarly, the article argues that migration patterns and ethnic disparities have a key role in shaping labour market inequalities within an ethnic economy which contains internal ethnicity.

This article, therefore, focuses primarily on the connections between migration, ethnicity and segmentation within the labour market of an ethnic economy. In order to reveal these connections, firstly, a brief review of the existing literature is presented, together with an explanation of the theoretical approaches adopted and the contribution this research makes to the literature. The data and methodology used are then presented, followed by the results showing how Kurdish migrants are located within the lower segments of the ethnic economy's labour market when compared with Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants. Finally, an explanation is offered of the factors related to migration patterns and ethnic penalty that lead Kurdish migrants to be situated in these lower segments.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on labour, migration and ethnic economies. It, therefore, touches on relevant research areas containing labour market segmentation, ethnic economies with enclave hypothesis (ethnic enclave and social capital) and Kurdish studies.

As a theoretical framework, this article employs a multi-segmented labour market approach, widely used to address inequalities in labour markets. This approach illustrates

the rise of segmented labour markets in the capitalist economy as a result of the economic dualism between labour and capital (Massey et al., 1993). Certain social groups – due to their gender or race, for example – have limited opportunities and are relegated to the second division of the labour market by the social, legal and institutional forces within capitalist economies (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006). While classical segmented labour market approaches (Dickens and Lang, 1985; Piore, 1979; Reich, 1984; Ryan, 1981; Tolbert et al., 1980) offer a dualistic model for labour markets comprising primary and secondary sectors, more recent studies (Gittleman and Howell, 1995; Leontaridi, 1998; Rubery, 2007) propose a multi-segmented labour market approach in which labour markets are divided into multiple layers.

This segmentation approach recognises that sectors differ significantly in terms of employment stability, working conditions, working hours and earnings. In the primary sectors, employment structures and conditions are relatively stable, working conditions are comfortable, career opportunities are plentiful and wages are more than sufficient for daily needs. Labour conditions in the secondary sectors are in stark contrast (Ryan, 2008). The differences in average job reward allow us to see these segments at industrial, occupational and company levels, although it should be noted that the boundaries between segments in the labour market are not clearly defined. The approach adopted analyses labour market divisions, inequalities and dualisms by focusing on the demand side of the labour market in capitalist employment structures, suggesting that inequalities in labour markets are shaped by employers, business owners and broader economic conditions through selective access to occupational opportunities. In other words, inequalities arise through the influence of non-competing groups based on social class, race or migration status via corporate policies and practices in the workplace and labour markets (Grimshaw et al., 2017).

The labour market segmentation framework is useful in showing the labour market conditions of one migrant group in comparison to the existing population or other migrant groups. Studies using this approach (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006; Constant and Massey, 2005; Felbo-Kolding et al., 2019; Keles et al., 2019; Lusic and Bauder, 2010) examine the outcomes of migration on labour markets by comparing the labour market conditions for migrants in ethnic economies (the secondary sector) with those for the existing population in the wider economy (the primary sector). They show that, since the secondary sector is unappealing due to its unfavourable conditions, the existing population generally prefers to work in the primary sector. Employers, therefore, turn to migrants to fill the labour shortfall in the secondary sector (Massey et al., 1993). The migrants responding to this labour demand cannot find suitable jobs in the primary sector due to their language deficiency, lack of knowledge about the destination country or lack of occupational education, as well as discrimination or racism on the part of others. This migrant labour supply, therefore, provides companies with greater flexibility (Stalker, 2001, cited in Lusic and Bauder, 2010). In this context, as this study illustrates, the multi-segmented labour market approach is a functional analytical tool, able to show how the labour markets of ethnic economies are stratified. This theoretical framework, when used in combination with the enclave hypothesis, is highly effective in revealing the reasons for labour market stratification within ethnic economies.

Studies employing the enclave hypothesis theorised by Portes and co-authors (Portes and Jensen, 1987; Portes and Shafer, 2007; Wilson and Portes, 1980) investigate the role played by ethnicity in the labour market positions of migrants by comparing the economic outcomes of migrants operating in an ethnic economy with those of migrants working in the mainstream economy. These studies are limited in revealing the effects of internal ethnicity or ethnic variety within an ethnic economy's labour market. However, as this study unpacks below, adopting a multi-segmented labour market approach alongside the enclave hypothesis would help to clarify the distinctions between ethnic groups within the labour market of an ethnic economy which has internal ethnicity, and to identify the interrelated mechanisms which relegate one ethnic group (in this case Kurdish migrants) to the lower segments of the labour market of this ethnic economy. The analysis below reveals that the drivers which lead Kurdish migrants to these lower segments are closely related to the group's distinctive features. However, studies on Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants in the UK (Dedeoğlu, 2014; Erdemir and Vasta, 2007; Küçükcan, 1999; Strüder, 2003) have generally included Kurds in the same category as Turks, people of Turkish origin and Turkish-speaking populations. Moreover, Kurds are not considered a separate group in labour-related statistics in the UK. In the ethnic classification used by the ONS (Office for National Statistics), for example, both Turks and Kurds from Turkey and Turkish Cypriots – who each have very different experiences and outcomes in the labour market – all fall within the 'White Other' category (Virk, 2019). This form of categorisation does not recognise differences in internal ethnicity and hides the specific characteristics of Kurds, making them a non-visible minority (Holgate et al., 2012). While a limited number of studies consider the labour market conditions of Kurdish migrants in the UK and their employment patterns within the ethnic economy (Atay, 2010; Holgate et al., 2012; Karan, 2017; Kesici, 2020; King et al., 2008; Sirkeci et al., 2016), the majority of the existing research addresses neither the segmentation within the ethnic economy nor the underprivileged position of Kurds within this economy from a comparative perspective. However, in the absence of adequate statistical data on the Kurds' economic activities, this study adopts a comparative perspective, based primarily on qualitative research to illuminate the Kurds' experiences in the labour market. The case of Kurdish migrants operating within an ethnic economy is not only important because it sheds light on this otherwise invisible group, but also because it reveals the need to pay analytical attention to the effects of migration histories, motivations of migrant (sub)groups and the ethnic disparities within ethnic economies.

Studies comparing the different labour market outcomes of migrant (sub)groups are still scarce. In one such study, Morales (2008) observes that dark-skinned Latinx workers in California are relegated to ethnic niches of employment in contrast to lighter-skinned individuals. Khatib (2012) shows that Muslim Black Africans experience harsher working conditions than White-Muslim groups in the UK's labour markets and that the ethnic colour penalty is greater than the ethno-religious penalty for Muslims. Along similar lines, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) demonstrate how ethnic and racial discrimination against recent refugee groups has led to a segmented labour market in Western Australia. In a unique example of a study focusing on internal ethnicity, Light et al. (1993) investigate the ethnic economy of Iranians in Los Angeles – comprising four ethno-religious (sub)groups of Armenians, Bahais, Jews and Muslims – and find that the Iranians operate

in four distinctive ethnic economies which are weakly linked to an overarching Iranian ethnic economy. These studies provide significant insight into how structural forces such as racism and discrimination affect the labour market positions of different migrant (sub) groups in the destination countries.

The case of Kurdish migrants analysed here adds another layer to these comparative approaches to migrant (sub)groups. To understand why certain groups occupy the lowest levels of the labour market within ethnic economies, firstly, we need to consider the distinct migration histories and motives of migrant (sub)groups. Secondly, we need to focus on how structural forces such as racism and persecution against ethnic and religious minorities in the country of origin pave the way for the creation of an ethnic penalty for these minorities in the destination country. This article therefore highlights migration and ethnicity as drivers of labour market segmentation within ethnic economies. As elaborated, in detail, in the following parts of this article, Kurds are located in lower segments than Turks and Turkish Cypriots within the labour market of their shared ethnic economy in London because they suffer from an ongoing ethnic penalty, have a shorter migration history and distinct migration motivations.

Method and data

This study is based on field research, the review of the relevant literature and statistical data extracted from the 2001 UK Census which included data on the Kurds' economic activities, unlike the 2011 Census.²

The field research was conducted over 12 months in London in 2014 and 2015 and included face-to-face, formal and informal interviews and participant observations. The sample consists of Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants, representing a total of approximately 200–250,000 in the UK (Sirkeci and Esipova, 2013). In the first stage of the field research, I ascertained that the majority of the members of this community live in North London, specifically in the boroughs of Enfield, Haringey, Hackney and Islington (London Datastore, 2015), and I therefore focused this research on those particular boroughs. During the research year, I regularly joined migrants' events and visited migrant associations, community centres, businesses and homes, conducting countless informal interviews with members of the three communities and individuals involved with the ethnic economy and community organisations, to listen to and take notes of the stories of their migration and their working lives in the UK. These visits and informal interviews made it easier for me to find participants for the formal interviews and also enriched the results of the formal interviews.

I contacted the interviewees through organisations, cafes, workplaces and community leaders, and additionally used the snowball method to recruit participants. Through semi-structured interviews, I explored in depth the demographic features, migration, social relationships, work histories and working or unemployment conditions of migrants. In light of my preliminary research and field observations, I conducted 60 formal interviews with migrants, half of whom were female and half male. Of the interviewees, 17 migrants identified as Kurdish (15 Kurds and 2 Kurdish-Turkish), while 20 identified as Turkish and 11 as Turkish-Cypriot. The remainder designated themselves Cypriot, British Cypriot, British, Alevi, Zaza, Circassian or simply 'human'. They comprise 24

workers, 20 self-employed or business proprietors and 16 not in paid work, including those who identified as unemployed, retired, unpaid family workers or homemakers. Differences exist within these migrant groups in terms of age, gender and generational background so, in order to obtain more specific data during each interview, I also asked migrants about their knowledge of the labour market conditions for their communities and for other migrant groups in the ethnic economy. In this way, I obtained valuable information, for instance, from a Turkish-Cypriot migrant about the working conditions of Kurdish and Turkish migrants, and the converse also occurred. However, it should be noted that this research focuses on Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants operating within the ethnic economy in the UK and does not, therefore, include the experiences of other members of these communities who work outside this ethnic economy.

According to this field research, the majority of the Kurds travelled to the UK to seek asylum as a result of the discrimination and political difficulties they faced in Turkey, while only one Turk and two Turkish Cypriots stated that their reason for migrating was political. Only two Kurds stated that they want to return to Turkey, while the majority of Turks and Turkish Cypriots are sure that they will return to their 'homeland'. In terms of education received in the country of origin, Kurds had received less formal education than Turks or Turkish Cypriots and many, therefore, arrive in the UK as unskilled job seekers. Moreover, fewer Kurds than Turks or Turkish Cypriots had received a formal education in the UK. The majority of Kurds said they have a limited grasp of the English language while the majority of Turks claimed to have intermediate levels and the majority of Turkish Cypriots to have advanced English-language skills. Only one Kurdish worker had had training provided by his employer – a one-day hygiene course – while many Turks and Turkish Cypriots had been provided with vocational training by their employers. The majority of Kurds are involved in precarious forms of employment in small businesses with strenuous working conditions and long hours. The average working day for Kurdish workers in takeaways, cafes, restaurants, corner shops or off-licences is around 12 hours, compared with around 10 hours for Turkish workers and fewer than 10 hours for Turkish-Cypriot workers. Similarly, self-employed Kurds work around 15 hours per day, while self-employed Turks work around 12 hours and self-employed Turkish Cypriots around 10 hours per day. Thus, as detailed below, the data confirm the existence of a multi-segmented labour market within the ethnic economy in which Kurdish migrants are allocated less desirable jobs than Turks or Turkish Cypriots.

Kurdish migrants' employment patterns in the lower segments of the ethnic economy

The ethnic (migrant) economy of Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants and their descendants in the UK can be defined as a network of labour, production and consumption – with its own characteristic features – created by the migrants within the UK's wider economic structure (Light and Gold, 2000; Räuchle and Schmitz, 2019). It is primarily found in that part of the service sector which predominantly requires labour for arduous work. Businesses are small and owned by a family or a group of relatives, and the owners are generally actively involved in the business. The labour market of the

ethnic economy is very flexible; its characteristics include informal employment, lack of social security, long working hours, difficult working conditions, busy working days and low wages. However, the ethnic economy can itself be considered as a field of sectors, ranging from primary to secondary in a multi-segmented labour market structure. The rewards of the ethnic economy's primary sectors are relatively high in terms of earnings, conditions, working hours, job security, training opportunities and career prospects, while the rewards of the secondary sectors, which include many small shops, are low (for more information, see Karan, 2017; Kesici, 2015; Sirkeci et al., 2016). Within this ethnic economy, (un)employment, business ownership, income, informality, exploitation, working conditions and hours are used as segmentation indicators.

The 2001 Census (the only Census to provide information on the economic activities of Kurds) shows that employment rates among Kurdish migrants in London were lower than among Turks or Turkish Cypriots. It also shows that, while the overall unemployment rate in London was 4.7%, it was 7.7% for Turkish Cypriots, 9.9% for Turks and 12.8% for Kurds (Enneli et al., 2005; Greater London Authority [GLA], 2009). This study confirms that, almost 15 years later, unemployment is still more frequent among Kurds than Turks and Turkish Cypriots and that Kurdish migrants still find fewer employment opportunities. According to the Census, self-employment was higher for Turkish Cypriots, average for Turks and lower for Kurdish migrants (GLA, 2009). Enneli et al. (2005) also observe that, compared to Turks and Turkish Cypriots, fewer Kurds own their own businesses. This study supports these findings and adds that Kurdish enterprises are smaller than those of the Turks and Turkish Cypriots. The Census shows that nearly 48% of Kurdish employees worked part-time (fewer than 30 hours per week), compared to 34% of Turks and under 26% of Turkish Cypriots (GLA, 2009). This study concurs that irregular employment is more prevalent among Kurds than Turks and Turkish Cypriots; during the interviews, many Kurdish migrants stated that they were involved in undeclared work even after they had been processed as refugees.

The opportunity to access vocational training is a useful indicator of migrants' positions in the layers of the labour market. In the lower layers, employers do not provide vocational training for workers (Grimshaw et al., 2017). Kurds have negligible opportunities to attend vocational training provided by their employers, in comparison to Turks and Turkish Cypriots, again indicating that Kurdish migrants are in the lower segments. The only Kurdish worker provided with training by his employer commented, '*Actually, it is a one-week course but we did it in a day. So, I mean, that's how it is. Everybody wangles it*' (Interviewee No. 7, aged 63, male). As a result, fewer Kurds than Turks or Turkish Cypriots are experts in a particular field (Enneli et al., 2005).

Working conditions and working hours are the most important indicators of migrants' position in the labour market. Compared to their Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot counterparts, both employed and self-employed Kurds endure longer working hours in the ethnic economy, and this is particularly true of small businesses. The average working day of the Kurdish interviewees was longer than that of the Turks or Turkish Cypriots: one Kurdish worker worked as a butcher at an abattoir for 12 hours each weekday night and, on weekdays and weekends, he installed satellite dishes when orders came in (Interviewee No. 1, aged 40, male). A self-employed Kurdish business owner worked 18 to 20 hours each day, seven days a week, and sometimes did not even go home. He commented, '*You*

have to do it; you're all in it together with the family and kids' (Interviewee No. 7, aged 63, male). This study also found that Kurdish migrants have more strenuous working conditions than the Turks and Turkish Cypriots in the lower segments of the labour market. Kurdish migrants, the majority of whom are blue-collar workers, are often involved in precarious employment, working as *doner* restaurant employees, cleaners, dishwashers, waiters, drivers, barbers, hairdressers or grocers, or are self-employed in the service sector or construction industry. One self-employed Kurd observed, *'I mean, how can I tell you that, heavy working conditions. It depends on what you do but, overall, it is too heavy'* (Interviewee No. 42, aged 38, male).

Kurds are subject to higher levels of exploitation than Turks and Turkish Cypriots in the UK (Kesici, 2020) and have comparatively low income levels (Sirkeci et al., 2016). Moreover, according to the evidence found in my field work, the income of Kurdish migrants in the UK is less than that of Turks or Turkish Cypriots.

Lower levels of employment, vocational education, business ownership and income; higher levels of unemployment, informal employment and exploitation; longer working hours and harder working conditions are all results of the Kurds' disadvantages in the ethnic economy and indicators that they are in the lower segments of the labour market. While inter-segment mobility is limited between the ethnic economy and the wider economy, labour turnover within the labour market segments of the ethnic economy is greater. However, this turnover takes time, and such mobility is not equally accessible for all ethnic groups due to ethnic disparities and distinct migration histories and motivations.

The drivers of labour market segmentation: Reasons why Kurdish migrants are in the lower segments of the ethnic economy

As revealed in detail below, the origins of Kurdish migrants' difference and the inequalities they suffer in the UK can be better seen if traced back to their country of origin, as Bozorgmehr (1997) and Light et al. (1993) demonstrate in the case of Iranian migrants in California.

Migration history: Relative newcomers in the UK

Kurds, mainland Turks and Turkish Cypriots have different histories of migration despite operating within the same ethnic economy (Karan, 2017; Kesici, 2020). Turkish Cypriots moved earliest to the UK due to their colonial ties, with intense migration starting in the 1950s (Strüder, 2003). In the 1960s, migration increased of mainland Turks seeking employment in Western Europe including the UK. At this time, however, only a small number of Kurds sought employment abroad (Wahlbeck, 2002). By the second half of the 1970s, however, Kurdish migration from Turkey to Europe and the UK gained momentum. Three factors were decisive in this change: firstly, the Alevi³ massacres (the Maras Massacre in 1978, Malatya Massacre in 1977 and Corum Massacre in 1980) that targeted both Turkish and Kurdish Alevis in the late 1970s; secondly, the military coup in 1980 that targeted Kurds and Alevis, along with left-wing Turks; and thirdly, the

Turkish counter-insurgency against the Kurdish liberation movement – including the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers' Party) – that dispossessed and displaced over a million Kurds and turned Bakur (Northern Kurdistan) into an emergency zone throughout the 1990s (Jongerden, 2010; Yonucu, 2021). During the 1980s and 1990s, over 500,000 people, a significant percentage of whom were Kurds, fled Turkey to seek asylum in European countries including the UK (Dahlman, 2002; Kesici, 2020) and the 1990s represented the peak of Kurdish migration to Europe, and specifically to the UK (Enneli et al., 2005).

Compared to other migrant groups within the same ethnic economy, therefore, the majority of the Kurdish community has a shorter history of immigration and employment (King et al., 2008). For example, one Kurdish interviewee addressed the discrepancy between the migration histories of Kurds, Turks and Turkish Cypriots to the UK in our meeting at the Kurdish community centre:

In my opinion, the Cypriots have already settled and the majority of them are very integrated. . . . Turks have also set up many businesses here. . . . As Kurds, we're new here. Our presence only goes back about 30 or 40 years. We do not have a long history in the UK. (Interviewee No. 59, aged 38, female)

In the 1980s and 1990s, as Kurdish immigration intensified, the textile industry in the UK was marked by extreme competition, with an influx of cheap goods from Eastern European countries. Newly arrived Kurds found it difficult to find work in the industrial sectors and to save money, which they would need to do if they wanted to launch their own businesses within the ethnic economy. A self-employed Kurdish interviewee who arrived in London in 2003 cited his own experience as an example:

From the start, I mean, ever since our arrival here, not just me but anyone who came here as an immigrant or without a residence permit or formal education worked in the food sector. Some work in shops, some in restaurants, and some in takeaways. . . . I was in the restaurant business. I worked at twenty different places after I came here, twenty different jobs, and all of them were at restaurants. (Interviewee No. 43, aged 40, male)

Their situation was exacerbated by their poor language skills and lack of formal education in English, a natural consequence of late migration, as well as the fact that the economic circumstances at the time were not favourable (King et al., 2008; Sirkeci et al., 2016). A Kurdish solicitor who works as a consultant for a Kurdish community organisation, providing services for a large number of immigrant Kurds daily, stated that the majority of migrants have a very limited grasp of English (Interviewee No. 9, aged 30, female)⁴ because their migration history is relatively short and they have not found any opportunity to work outside the ethnic economy.

In conclusion, their migration has resulted in a situation in which the Kurdish migrants must work in the lower segments of the labour market, which forces them into a vicious cycle of low skills and low income in the ethnic economy.

The motivations for migration: Being refugees and undocumented migrants

In addition to this relatively short migration history, the Kurds' motivation for migration was also effective in pushing them towards the lower segments of the labour market within the ethnic economy.

As mentioned above, to escape oppression and violence, hundreds of thousands of Kurds have fled Turkey to seek asylum in European countries since the late 1970s. The persecution of this community resulted in a large number of Kurdish asylum seekers, many of whom settled across Europe, and particularly in the UK, in the 1980s and 1990s (Enneli et al., 2005; Kesici, 2020). As the Refugee Council (RC, 1997) reports, Kurds were among the 10 largest population groups seeking asylum in the UK in the 1990s, and the wave of political immigration from Turkey continued through the 2000s (Demir, 2012). Therefore, the majority of Kurds employed in the ethnic economy arrived in the UK to seek asylum and were undocumented migrants at the start of their life in the UK (Enneli et al., 2005), unlike their Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot counterparts whose emigration was, for the most part, driven by family-related reasons and economic motives (Sirkeci et al., 2016). This reflects the situation of the Kurds who participated in this research.

It is well known among labour scholars that asylum seekers, refugees and/or undocumented migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation than are other workers and 'economic immigrants'. Their employment is frequently precarious; they are low paid and have to endure degrading and difficult working conditions for long hours (Dwyer et al., 2016). During the process of seeking asylum, which may take several years, they are not granted permission to work and have to survive on much lower social security rates than mainstream benefit levels (Waite et al., 2015). These conditions are also true for Kurdish migrants working in undesirable secondary-sector jobs in the ethnic economy. Some Kurdish immigrants to the UK remain undocumented for several years (GLA, 2009) and this lack of documentation makes them even more vulnerable to the most severe forms of exploitation. A Kurdish migrant who moved to the UK in 1989 as an asylum seeker describes the working conditions of refugees:

I used to work at night. As a matter of fact, the conditions of refugee and immigrant people are like that; working at night is more convenient. For employers, cheap labour is available at night as well. So, we worked with very low wages. (Interviewee No. 7, aged 63, male)

Another migrant describes this same situation: '*Since the employees do not have a work permit, a Turkish employer who I know employs them for long periods, at very low wages, and treats them very badly*' (Informal interview, female interviewee aged around 25).

The migrants are obliged to accept this insecure employment because they cannot return to 'their home country' owing to the discrimination and oppression they face in Turkey. The Kurdish participants in this research were very sceptical about the idea of a return to Turkey. When I asked one self-employed Kurdish interviewee, '*Would you consider going back to Turkey?*' he responded:

I would consider going back to Turkey depending on the circumstances. . . . Political conditions in Turkey are still difficult. There is still discrimination and abuse of ethnic minorities, so you cannot trust it entirely. You still can't speak your own language, you're afraid to say you are Kurdish. (Interviewee No. 49, aged 48, male)

As seen, the door of return, while open for Turks and Turkish Cypriots, is closed for most Kurds, and they have no option but to work in the UK.

Ethnic disparity: Ongoing ethnic penalty and hiding ethnic social capital

As the largest minority group in Turkey, Kurds have suffered state violence and racist discrimination since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The official Turkish nationalist ideology denied the very existence of the Kurds, deeming their language illegal, thus criminalising the use of the Kurdish language in public spaces until recently, and denying or degrading their cultural heritage (Gunes, 2013). The Kurds have also suffered from economic discrimination as a result of the de-development policies of the Turkish administrations making social, infrastructural and public services – including education, healthcare and employment – less accessible to them (White, 1998; Yadirgi, 2017). Kurdish internal migrants in the predominantly Turkish cities of Turkey, 'constitute an underclass, poorly educated, ill-paid, and discriminated against by both employers and local authorities' (Bruinessen, 1998: 49). Similarly, many Kurdish participants in this research who came to the UK for both economic and political reasons stated that they suffered disadvantages and discrimination in Turkey due to being a Kurd or speaking Kurdish. The ethnic penalty for Kurdish migrants, traced back to Turkey, is then perpetuated in the UK where Kurds are also exposed to ethnic discrimination in their shared ethnic economy. Some of the Kurdish interviewees commented that some Turkish business-owners in London will not employ them:

For example, I went to work in a very well-known restaurant but it caught my attention there, there were no Kurds. I wonder why. Because, in London, it is Kurds who work in such restaurants and markets. Then I learned that the owner of the restaurant is from the Black Sea region [a region where Turkish nationalism is prevalent] . . . There are many restaurants here where they don't take Kurds into their businesses. (Interviewee No. 43, aged 40, male)

Many Kurdish workers and self-employed business owners in the UK find they need to hide their Kurdish identity in their working and business life, due to the Turkish colonialism extended to Kurds in the UK. When I asked a Kurdish restaurant owner, '*Why do you not give your restaurant a Kurdish name?*' he replied, '*If we gave a Kurdish name to our business, we would not operate in the market [ethnic economy]*' (Informal interview, male interviewee aged around 45). Other migrants highlight similar experiences, '*Turks do not enter a Kurd's shop . . . There are such things. There are some people who do it consciously*' (Interviewee No. 43, aged 40, male). '*We [Turks] have good relationships with other communities. But I would not buy a newspaper that propagates Kurdishness*' (Informal interview, male interviewee aged around 50). Kurdish migrants are, therefore, careful not to use Kurdish in the business life of the ethnic economy although many

interviewees felt that they had learned to speak Kurdish better in the UK. The common language of the ethnic economy is Turkish; the Kurds' restaurants are called Turkish restaurants (*Türk restorani*) and their supermarkets Turkish grocery stores (*Türk bak-kali*). Their menus and price lists are in Turkish (and English); despite some exceptions, they serve 'Turkish cuisine' in their restaurants and cafes; they play Turkish music in their shops. They cannot, thus, use the advantages deriving from their Kurdish ethnic social capital; they have, to some extent, to hide their social capital, a vital element for success in the ethnic economies.

This explains further why Kurdish migrants are in the lower segments of the ethnic economy than Turks or Turkish Cypriots. According to the enclave hypothesis (Wilson and Portes, 1980), the economic return of human capital conveyed from the original culture is higher in the ethnic economy than in the sectors of the mainstream economy which recruit immigrant labour. Enclave entrepreneurs and the self-employed obtain higher pay-offs than their peers of the same ethnicity, with similar combined knowledge, who are employed in sectors of the mainstream economy (Portes and Shafer, 2007). Therefore, the impact of social capital, which is stronger in the ethnic communities than the general economy, plays an important role in the ethnic economies. Here, ethnic groups gain some of the economic benefits which can only be reached in the monopoly sectors, despite belonging to the competitive sectors. Ethnic enterprises are able to gain these advantages by means of their social capital and ethnic links, which enable them to control different levels of the production chain (Light and Gold, 2000). Kurdish migrants in the UK, however, cannot sufficiently benefit from the advantages deriving from social capital and ethnic links due to their ongoing ethnic penalty; they are, thus, relegated to the lower segments of the ethnic economy.

Conclusion: Migration patterns and ethnic disparity as aspects of segmentation in labour markets

Drawing on the case of Kurdish migrants within a shared ethnic economy with Turks and Turkish Cypriots in London, this article tackles segmentation within ethnic economies. It suggests a need to move beyond existing studies which compare migrants with the existing population or migrants operating in the ethnic economy with those working in the mainstream economy in terms of labour market outcomes. These studies have limited ability to demonstrate the economic inequalities and the segmentation of labour markets within ethnic economies that contain internal ethnicity. To develop a more nuanced understanding of segmentation within ethnic economies, the article employs a multi-segmented labour market framework and the enclave hypothesis. Thus, it reveals key findings that show how one ethnic group – in comparison to other ethnic groups – is relegated to the lower layers of the labour market in a shared ethnic economy and unveils the drivers of labour market segmentation which lead this ethnic group to operate in the lower segments of the ethnic economy. In so doing, it also sheds light on the specific characteristics of Kurdish labour and the labour market patterns of Kurds in the UK who have been rendered invisible.

The article forms part of the literature located at the intersection of studies on the ethnic economies, ethnic enclaves and labour market segmentation. Within this literature, the reasons for the distinctive labour market outcomes of immigrant groups are varied. The factors determining migrants' labour market patterns in destination countries have been found to include the skin colour of migrants (Morales, 2008), migration histories, education, colour racism (Khattab, 2012), employment structures, occupational and industrial clustering (Light et al., 1993), and ethnic and racial discrimination (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006). This article contributes to the literature by presenting an interrelated mechanism, associated with distinct migration histories, different migration motivations and ethnic disparities, as the main factors determining the allocation of migrants to the primary and secondary sectors within an ethnic (migrant) economy. While Khattab (2012) and Morales (2008) draw attention to the vulnerabilities of dark-skinned migrants, this article calls attention to the disadvantages of Kurdish migrants. In contrast to the study of Light et al. (1993), which demonstrates how Iranian (sub)groups occupy detached ethnic economies in Los Angeles, this article shows how Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants are located in distinct layers of one multi-segmented ethnic economy in London. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) argue that ethnic and racial discrimination in the destination countries enables employers to fill the least desirable jobs with cheap migrant labour and find that the employment patterns of refugee groups are closely related to their underprivileged positions in these destination countries. However, the case of Kurdish migrants examined in this article demonstrates that racism and persecution against an ethnic group in the country of origin, then transferred to the destination country, also provide employers with opportunities to relegate members of this ethnic group to the lower segments of the labour market in the destination country. The employment patterns of migrants in destination countries are, therefore, closely related to their underprivileged position in their country of origin as well.

Thus, this article elucidates how and why Kurdish migrants are located in the secondary segments of the labour market within their ethnic economy in the UK. Kurdish migrants have a more recent immigration history and tend to have a limited command of English and lack formal education. Unlike the Turks and Turkish Cypriots, most of whom moved to the UK to seek better jobs and an improved standard of living, the majority of Kurdish migrants fled to the UK to seek asylum. Since they fled state violence, discrimination and repressive policies against Kurds in Turkey, they are unwilling to return. Thus, the door of return, which is open for others, is closed for most Kurds. Moreover, they cannot take advantage of their Kurdish ethnic social capital and, in many cases, have to hide it within the ethnic economy, due to the ethnic penalty which can be traced back to Turkey and is perpetuated in the UK. These factors curtail opportunities for Kurdish migrants, limit their ability to access benefits and result in a situation in which they tend to be relegated to a relatively disadvantaged position and forced to occupy the lower levels of segmented labour markets in the ethnic economy. These interactions and mechanisms, thus, bring to the surface the connections between migration, ethnicity and segmentation in labour markets.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr Deniz Yonucu for her crucial comments, which improved this article. I would also like to thank the Editor of WES and three anonymous referees for their insightful remarks on the earlier versions of the manuscript.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of Kurdish worker Zeydin Abo.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Einstein Guest Researcher Programme of the Einstein Foundation Berlin (Grant No. EGR-2019-533).

ORCID iD

Mehmet Rauf Kesici  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9849-6029>

Notes

1. In this study, ‘migrants’ is used as an umbrella term that encompasses immigrants, (un)documented migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and similar individuals. The terms ‘Kurds’ or ‘Kurdish migrants’ refer to Kurdish people from Turkey now in the UK. The Kurdish community is a stateless population, the majority of whom traditionally live in Turkey (Bakur), Iraq (Bashur), Iran (Rojhelat/Rojhilat), Syria (Rojava), Armenia and, now, Europe (Dahlman, 2002; for a study on Kurdish migrants from Bashur in the UK, see Keles et al., 2019).
2. Since there are no data on Kurds’ economic activities in the regular statistical tables of the 2011 Census, unlike the 2001 Census, I requested statistical data from the ONS about the economic activities of Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot migrants in the UK. On 7 April 2020, ONS Social Statistics (socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk) responded briefly, stating that, although data are available under ‘INECAC05, Basic Economic Activity’ on migrants from Turkey (792 Turkey) in the UK, there is no distinct subcategory for economic activities of Kurdish migrants from Turkey. Migrants from Cyprus, however, are divided into two subcategories – ‘902 Cyprus (Non-European Union)’ and ‘903 Cyprus (Not Otherwise Specified)’.
3. After the Sunnis, the Alevi are the second-largest religious community in Turkey and speak Turkish and/or Kurdish (Yilmaz, 2016). Today, the majority of Kurds in London are Alevi (Demir, 2012).
4. During our interview, an elderly Kurd who arrived in the UK many years ago and is now a British citizen handed his mobile phone to the consultant so she could interpret between his landlord and himself, which she proceeded to do.

References

- Atay T (2010) ‘Ethnicity within ethnicity’ among the Turkish-speaking immigrants in London. *Insight Turkey* 12(1): 123–138.
- Bozorgmehr M (1997) Internal ethnicity: Iranians in Los Angeles. *Sociological Perspectives* 40(3): 387–408.
- Bruinessen MV (1998) Shifting national and ethnic identities: the Kurds in Turkey and the European diaspora. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18(1): 39–52.

- Colic-Peisker V and Tilbury F (2006) Employment niches for recent refugees: segmented labour market in twenty-first century Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19(2): 203–229.
- Constant A and Massey DS (2005) Labor market segmentation and the earnings of German guest-workers. *Population Research and Policy Review* 24(5): 489–512.
- Dahlman C (2002) The political geography of Kurdistan. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 43(4): 271–299.
- Dedeoğlu S (2014) *Migrants, Work and Social Integration / Women's Labour in Turkish Ethnic Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Demir I (2012) Battling with Memleket in London: the Kurdish diaspora's engagement with Turkey. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38(5): 815–831.
- Dickens WT and Lang K (1985) A test of dual labor market theory. *American Economic Review* 75(4): 792–805.
- Dwyer P, Hodgkinson S, Lewis H and Waite L (2016) Socio-legal status and experiences of forced labour among asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 32(3): 182–198.
- Enneli P, Modood T and Bradley H (2005) *Young Turks and Kurds: A Set of 'Invisible' Disadvantaged Groups*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Erdemir A and Vasta E (2007) Differentiating irregularity and solidarity: Turkish immigrants at work in London. Policy and society working paper, Centre on Migration, Oxford.
- Felbo-Kolding J, Leschke J and Spreckelsen TF (2019) A division of labour? Labour market segmentation by region of origin: the case of intra-EU migrants in the UK, Germany and Denmark. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(15): 2820–2843.
- Gittleman MB and Howell DR (1995) Changes in the structure and quality of jobs in the United States: effects by race and gender, 1973–1990. *ILR Review* 48(3): 420–440.
- Greater London Authority (GLA) (2009) *Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot Communities in London*. London: GLA.
- Grimshaw D, Fagan C, Hebson G and Tavora I (2017) A new labour market segmentation approach for analysing inequalities: introduction and overview. In: Grimshaw D, Fagan C, Hebson G and Tavora I (eds) *Making Work More Equal*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1–32.
- Gunes C (2013) *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance*. London: Routledge.
- Holgate J, Keles J, Pollert A and Kumarappen L (2012) Workplace problems among Kurdish workers in London: experiences of an 'invisible' community and the role of community organisations as support networks. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38(4): 595–612.
- Jongerden J (2010) Village evacuation and reconstruction in Kurdistan (1993–2002). *Études Rurales* 186: 77–100.
- Karan O (2017) *Economic Survival Strategies of Turkish Migrants in London*. London: Transnational Press.
- Keles JY, Markova E and Fatah R (2019) Migrants with insecure legal status and access to work: the role of ethnic solidarity networks. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*. Epub ahead of print 20 August 2019. DOI: 10.1108/EDI-10-2018-0203.
- Kesici MR (2015) Londra'da Çalışan Türkiyeli Göçmenlerin Çalışma Süreleri ve Sosyal İlişkileri [Work hours and social relations of London's migrant workers from Turkey]. *3rd Turkish migration conference 2015*, Prague, 25–27 June.
- Kesici MR (2020) The visibility of an invisible community's labour exploitation in an ethnic economy: a comparative study on Kurdish movers in the United Kingdom. *Migration Letters* 17(3): 461–470.

- Khattab N (2012) 'Winners' and 'losers': the impact of education, ethnicity and gender on Muslims in the British labour market. *Work, Employment and Society* 26(4): 556–573.
- King R, Thomson M, Mai N and Keles Y (2008) 'Turks' in the UK: problems of definition and the partial relevance of policy. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 6(3): 423–434.
- Küçükcan T (1999) *Politics of Ethnicity, Identity and Religion: Turkish Muslims in Britain*. London: Ashgate.
- Leontaridi M (1998) Segmented labour markets: theory and evidence. *Journal of Economic Surveys* 12(1): 103–109.
- Light I and Gold SJ (2000) *Ethnic Economies*. New York: Academic Press.
- Light I, Sabagh G, Bozorgmehr M and Der-Martirosian C (1993) Internal ethnicity in the ethnic economy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16(4): 581–597.
- London Datastore (2015) *London Borough Profiles*. Available at: <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-borough-profiles> (accessed 14 June 2021).
- Lusis T and Bauder H (2010) Immigrants in the labour market: transnationalism and segmentation. *Geography Compass* 4(1): 28–44.
- Massey DS, Arango J, Hugo G, Kouaouci A, Pellegrino A and Taylor JE (1993) Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 19(3): 431–466.
- Morales MC (2008) The ethnic niche as an economic pathway for the dark skinned: labor market incorporation of Latina/o workers. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 30(3): 280–298.
- Piore MJ (1979) *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Portes A and Jensen L (1987) What's an ethnic enclave? The case for conceptual clarity. *American Sociological Review* 52: 768–771.
- Portes A and Shafer S (2007) Revisiting the enclave hypothesis: Miami twenty-five years later. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 25: 157–190.
- Räuchle C and Schmitz A (2019) Migrant economies: opportunity structures and potential in different city types. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42(10): 1766–1787.
- Refugee Council (RC) (1997) *Asylum Statistics 1986–1996*. London: RC.
- Reich M (1984) Segmented labour: time series hypothesis and evidence. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 8(1): 63–81.
- Rubery J (2007) Developing segmentation theory: a thirty years perspective. *Economies et Sociétés* 41(6): 941–964.
- Ryan P (1981) Segmentation, duality and the internal labour market. In: Wilkinson F (ed.) *The Dynamics of Labour Market Segmentation*. London: Academic Press, 3–20.
- Ryan P (2008) Primary and secondary labour markets. *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* 1(8): 5147–5149.
- Sirkeci I and Esipova N (2013) Turkish migration in Europe and desire to migrate to and from Turkey. *Border Crossing* 3(1): 1–13.
- Sirkeci I, Bilecen T, Coştu Y, Dedeoğlu S, Kesici MR, Şeker BD, Tilbe F and Unutulmaz KO (2016) *Little Turkey in Great Britain*. London: Transnational Press.
- Stalker P (2001) *The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration*. London: Verso.
- Strüder IR (2003) Do concepts of ethnic economies explain existing minority enterprises? The Turkish speaking economies in London. *Research Papers in Environmental and Spatial Analysis Series* 88: 1–34.
- Tolbert C, Horan PM and Beck EM (1980) The structure of economic segmentation: a dual economy approach. *American Journal of Sociology* 85(5): 1095–1116.

- Virk B (2019) Minority ethnic groups in the labour market. In: Craig G and Atkin K (eds) *Understanding 'Race' and Ethnicity: Theory, History, Policy, Practice*, 2nd Edition. London: Policy Press, 115–135.
- Wahlbeck Ö (2002) The concept of diaspora as an analytical tool in the study of refugee communities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28(2): 221–238.
- Waite L, Lewis H, Dwyer PJ and Hodkinson S (2015) Precarious lives: refugees and asylum seekers' resistance within unfree labouring. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14: 470–478.
- White PJ (1998) Economic marginalization of Turkey's Kurds: the failed promise of modernization and reform. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18(1): 139–158.
- Wilson KL and Portes A (1980) Immigrant enclaves: an analysis of the labor market experiences of Cubans in Miami. *American Journal of Sociology* 86(2): 295–319.
- Yadigci V (2017) *The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yilmaz B (2016) *Learning 'my' language: moments of languages and identities among Kurds in the UK*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, SOAS University of London, London.
- Yonucu D (2021) Counterinsurgency in Istanbul: provocative counterorganization, violent interpellation and sectarian fears. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Epub ahead of print 27 January 2021. DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2021.1880067.

Mehmet Rauf Kesici is Associate Professor of Social Policy. He is one of the signatories of the peace petition (We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime) in Turkey. He was dismissed from his position at Kocaeli University for signing this petition in 2016. Dr Kesici currently works as Einstein Guest Researcher at the School of Business and Economics, Freie Universität Berlin. He does research in labour economics, migration, social policy, industrial relations and European labour markets. His current research focuses on the working conditions and employment patterns of Kurdish and Turkish migrants in Berlin, the Ruhr Region and London.

Date submitted March 2020

Date accepted July 2021